

Khayyam turns 75 today. The master composer recreates some of his works

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THE sound of distant vehicles disturbs the calmness. Inside his spacious drawing room, music director Khayyam looks colourful and cheerful. His red printed shirt enhances the glow on his face, as he proudly talks about his achievements. "On February 18, I shall be completing 75 years. February is a memorable month for me. This month, I am also completing 50 years since I began working independently as a music director," he beams.

Time has indeed flown. After composing the Mohammed Rafi hit Akele Mein Woh Ghabrate To Honge in the film Biwi, Khayyam got a big break when he signed Footpath in 1952. Sham-e-Gham Ki Kasam, sung by the velvet-voiced Talat Mahmood, is a favourite among old-timers. Over the years, there have been many well-known scores — Lalarukh, Phir Subah Hogi, Shola Aur Shabnam, Shagun, Kabhi Kabhie, Trishul, Noorie, Razia Sultan, Thodisi Bewafai, Umrao Jaan and Bazaar are all examples of Khayyam's brilliance.

An important aspect of Khayyam's career is that he hasn't restricted himself to films, but has made a huge contribution in ghazals and bhajans too. While fans would know the work he's done with ghazal great Begum Akhtar, he has recently recorded the poetry of Kaifi Azmi in the voices of playback singers Alka Yagnik, Kavita Krishnamurthy, Udit Narayan and Roopkumar Rathod in the album Shaguftagi. "According to me, Kaifi Azmi is today's Ghalib," he says, before clarifying: "I'm not saying the other poets are lesser in any way, but Kaifisaab has that special poetic charm that Ghalib had."

As the music director talks to us, his wife — singer Jagjit Kaur — is cooking dinner. "Behind every successful man, there's a

woman," he laughs. Our conversation lasts well over two hours, as Khayyam talks about various films. Here, we carry a few excerpts of his trip down melody lane:

■ **FOOTPATH:** I got this offer in February 1952, and this was the first film I worked on independently as Khayyam. The songs were penned by Majrooh Sultanpuri and Ali Sardar Jafri, and Talat Mahmood's Sham-e-Gham became an evergreen hit. With this film, people felt I was creative.

■ **LALARUKH:** This film had lyrics by Kaifi Azmi, and had the hit song Pyaas Kuch Aur Bhi. I was lucky to compose songs which had true poetic flavour. In fact, during my entire career, I have never compromised on the quality of lyrics.

■ **PHIR SUBAH HOGI:** Director Ramesh Saigal's film was based

on Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime And Punishment. Because it starred Raj Kapoor, one initially felt Shankar-Jaikishen would do the music. But when Sahir Ludhianvi gave me the poem Woh Subah Kabhi To Aayegi, I composed it in five versions. I was shocked and scared because Rajsaab's expression was totally blank after he heard those versions. I never thought I'd get the film, but after a long discussion with the director, Rajsaab said he liked all versions so much that he didn't know which to choose. We kept the situation in mind and chose one of them, which we recorded with Mukesh.

■ **KABHI KABHIE:** Yash Chopra's 1976 film had a poetic subject. He and lyricist Sahir first came to me with three songs — Kabhi Kabhie, Main Pal Do Pal and Mere Ghar Aayee. The biggest challenge was to retain the poetic quality of the songs, and

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at the same time cater to the younger generation. But the songs were very successful. It was also the first in a series of hits with Yashji. Trishul's music was a hit, and the title song of Noorie is still hummed today.

■ **THODISI BEWAFAI:** I liked the subject of the film, and felt it had scope for good songs. People say I am choosy, but I am always careful about quality. I don't think of quantity. I can never let down my fans. If I come below their expectations, I feel guilty. Thodisi Bewafai had a successful title song, written wonderfully by Gulzar.

■ **UMRAO JAAN:** I have loved doing films with historical subjects. In Razia Sultan, which had Lata Mangeshkar's Aye Dil-e-Nadaan, I blended Indian, Turkish, Iranian and central Asian instruments and orchestrations. In Umrao Jaan, people thought I'd provide the same kind of music as Pakeezah. But I wanted to do something which had my individual stamp. So I read a book on this character Umrao Jaan. The lead

character had learnt classical music and Kathak dance, and wrote poetry. I had to bring out all these qualities. Shahryaar wrote ghazals that suited the situations, and I felt Asha Bhosle and Talat Aziz would be ideal singers. The songs Dil Cheez Kya Hai, In Aankhon Ki Masti and Yeh Kya Jagah Hai Doston brought out a special quality in Asha's singing.

■ **BAZAAR:** When I did Sagar Sarhadi's 1982 film Bazaar, I felt that the overall quality of poetry in film music had fallen. So for this film, I decided to use the poetry of great writers like Meer Taqi Meer, Bashir Nawaz, Maqdoom Mohiudeen and Mirza Shauk. They were high-standard poetic songs. And though a lot of people felt using such songs was a risk, the film's music became popular.

In recent years, however, I have been quite disappointed with the general standard of film music. So I do ghazal albums if I get the right kind of poetry. In fact, Shaguftagi with Kaifi Azmisaab is my gift to this nation in my 75th year.